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On Wrestling in Prayer
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There is an idea abroad that wrestling in prayer is always a good thing, but that is by no means true. Extreme religious exercises may be undergone with no higher motive than to get our own way.

The spiritual quality of a prayer is determined not by its intensity but by its origin. In evaluating prayer we should inquire who is doing the praying—our determined hearts or the Holy Spirit? If the prayer originates with the Holy Spirit, then the wrestling can be beautiful and wonderful; but if we are the victims of our own overheated desires, our praying can be as carnal as any other act.

Two examples are given in the Old Testament, Jacob and the prophets of Baal. Jacob's wrestling was a real exercise, and at first it was not Jacob's doing. "So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak." Obviously the "man" was the aggressor, not Jacob, but when Jacob had been beaten upon, he became the aggressor and cried, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The wrestling was of divine origin, and the blessed results are known to every Bible student.

The other example does not turn out so well. The prophets of Baal wrestled also, much more violently than Jacob, but they wrestled in the flesh. Their writhings were born of ignorance and superstition and got them nowhere. Everything was a mistake—their zeal, their body-punishing prayer, their determination. They were wrong in spite of their zealous praying. And such error did not die with them.

Only the Spirit can pray effectively. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26).

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